

FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH

NOTES

STATEWIDE:

For the 1999/2000 school year, an estimated 47.3% of all students in the state's public schools, the equivalent of 2,809,186 children, were enrolled in the Free or Reduced Price Meal Program in school.¹

RELATED INDICATORS:

- Supplemental Nutrition Programs
- CalWORKs
- Child Support
- 4th Grade Stanford 9 Reading/Math Scores

Indicator

Free and reduced lunch (FRL)

Definition

Number of students receiving free and reduced lunch in Orange County.

Findings

In 2000, 183,517 (37.03%) students of Orange County's total public school enrollment participated in the free and reduced lunch program. School districts with the largest percentage of students receiving FRL included Anaheim City (85.34%), Santa Ana Unified (73.45%) and La Habra City (72.70%). Fullerton Joint UHSD, Irvine Unified, and Los Alamitos Unified had the lowest percent of students in the FRL program (2.14%, 6.16% and 8.49%, respectively). See page 57 for the FRL percentage of each school district.

Trends

There was a 26.89% increase in the total number of students receiving free and reduced lunch in Orange County between 1994 and 2000 (144,626 to 183,517). The proportion of students receiving free and reduced lunch as a percent of total public school enrollment has also increased from 35.08% in 1994 to 37.03% in 2000. Although there was a slight decrease from 1996-1997 and again in 1999-2000, the overall trend stayed about the same with approximately 37% of total enrollment receiving free and reduced-price lunches.

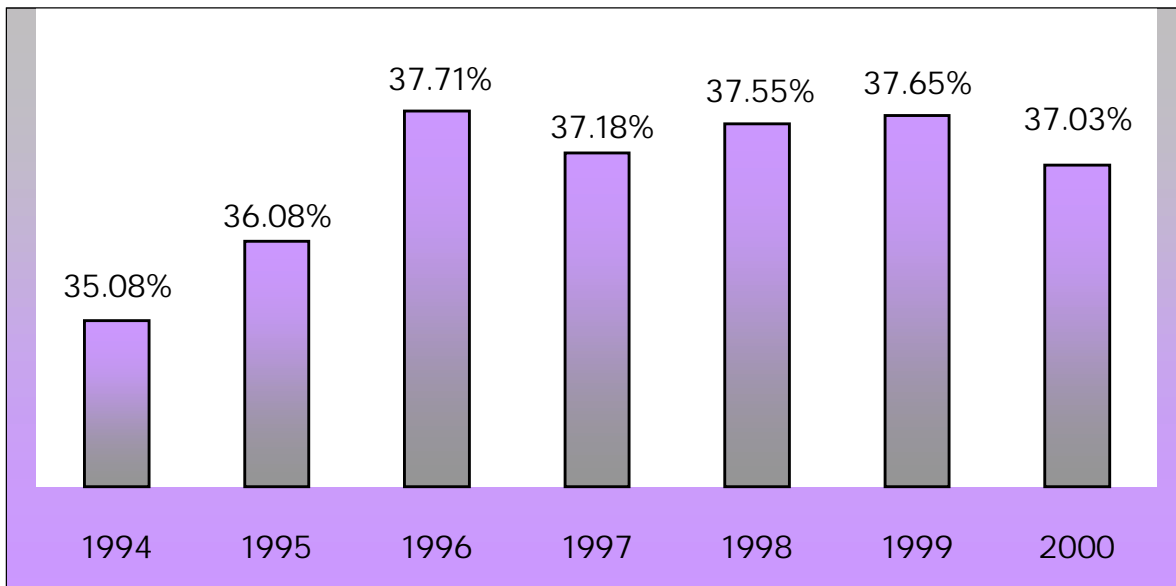
Household Size	2001 Federal Poverty Level Guidelines* (FPL)	2000 Free Eligibility** Lunch, Breakfast, Milk (130% FPL)	2000 Reduced Price Eligibility** Lunch, Breakfast (185% FPL)
2	\$11,610	\$14,625	\$20,813
3	\$14,630	\$18,395	\$26,178
4	\$17,650	\$22,165	\$31,543
5	\$20,670	\$25,935	\$36,908
6	\$23,690	\$29,705	\$42,273
7	\$26,710	\$33,475	\$47,638
8	\$29,730	\$37,245	\$53,003

* 2001 Federal Poverty Guidelines, *Federal Register*, Vol. 66, No. 33, 2/16/01.

** Income Eligibility Guidelines for FRL, California Dept. of Education, effective 7/00 to 6/01.

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Percent of Students Receiving
Free and Reduced Lunch, 1994-2000



Summary

The increased number of children participating in the FRL program over this period indicates both an increase in the use of the program and the number of children in Orange County that are living below, at, or slightly above the federal poverty level based on income eligibility criteria.

Implications

The Free and Reduced Lunch Program is a proxy for children in and near the poverty level and can be considered one of the best available current indicators of children in poverty or among the working poor families. A child is eligible for subsidized school meals if his/her parent's income is below 185% of the federal poverty level, which translates to over 37% of Orange County's children living in homes with incomes below 185% of the poverty level (\$31,543 per year for a family of four). The implications for children growing up in poverty are profound: children living in poverty are at greater risk for poor health, lower educational achievement, increased criminal activity and use of alcohol and other drugs, and are more likely to grow up in unsafe communities. Because of this relationship, the rate of children participating in the FRL Program is highly relevant to assessing the overall condition of children in Orange County.

It is also important to understand the challenges faced by a school district in which 85% of its students are eligible for the FRL Program compared to a district with only a 2% eligible student body. Achievement tests often indicate the educational challenges faced by these schools.

See page 61 for correlation between FRL and Stanford 9 Scores.

NOTES

NATIONWIDE:
In 1999, school cafeterias served 25 million daily lunches, on average, at a cost to the USDA of \$5,986 million. Nearly 58% of the lunches served were free or reduced-price meals.²

DATA SOURCE:
Orange County
Department of
Education

NOTES:
¹California
Department of
Education
²USDA Food and
Nutrition
Assistance
Programs